

# From Dependence to Independence: A Critical Study of the Search for Identity and Dignity in Balbir Madhopuri's *Changiya Rukh*

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## **Abstract:**

The present article aims at conceptualizing the relation between the caste and experience in Balbir Madhopuri's *Changiya Rukh (Against the Night)*, the first Dalit autobiography of Punjabi language as well as the region. This narrative, consisting twenty chapters, deals with different aspects of Punjabi region. From the first chapter 'My Birthplace Madhopur' to the twentieth chapter 'Being a Tenant' of the work make their own presentation with reference to multiple aspects of Dalits in India. He writes, this autobiography as an exclusive record of 'Ad Dharmi', a sub-caste of 'Chamar' in Punjab, and it also delineates his success through thorny paths. The metaphorical usage of the title denotes the deliberate stunt of the untouchable people of India in the hands of upper castes. This book, being a seminal work in the recent Dalit literature, offers an honest and powerful portrayal of suffering and social exclusion of Dalits in the rural Punjab. Soon after its translation into English, there had been a wide response for this work across the world for conveying the message of struggle against darkness of caste oppression, and realistic portrayal of Dalits.

**Key words:** Exploitation, society, caste, religion, hate, education, liberation, self-respect, hard work, identity, socio-transformation, equality, modernization, empowerment. etc.

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India's independence has paved the way for a plethora of opportunities across diverse sections of society and regions. It has indeed begun a new era that initiates a new journey towards self-determination and development, yielding significant results in various spheres, in spite of numerous challenges along the way. The constitution which was adopted after independence extended the social justice, fundamental rights and equality to all its citizens giving access to all the opportunities in the country. Educational access that has been extended to all its citizens, irrespective caste, creed and gender has created opportunities of sustenance and self-establishment with self-respect and dignity. The constitutional framework which addresses the historical injustices meted to the out castes, promotes the social inclusion for these marginalized communities by extending special provisions like reservations through which the self-sustenance is guaranteed for the development of these downtrodden castes under its shield.

The educational access of Dalits before and after the independence has paved them to get divers opportunities, and allowed them to excel in their lives despite faced many social barriers due to the established caste system and its afflictions. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who championed the Dalit movement around pre and post-independence played a very crucial role in giving them a new life of hope with different opportunities in the modern era. After his death, many Dalit

intellectuals who underwent his influence, arose and continued his legacy, and documented their experiences in the form of literary genres in order to motivate their upcoming generations for change within them. One of the most important literary genres of Dalit literature in addition to poetry, short stories and novels is 'autobiographical literature' which has created a new trend in the Indian literary arena.

Dalit literature refers to the corpus of writing, emerges from the experiences of the Dalit communities in India. Dalit scholars who have been historically victims of untouchability, discrimination, oppression and exploitation due to the age old caste system of India, have produced their literature in different languages, and genres that often focuses on the themes of social injustice, caste-based violence, and their struggle for equality and identity with self-respect. The Dalit literature serves as a form of socio-political commentary, aiming to bring awareness from their experiences, and promotes the social transformation. The body of writings which highlights the issues like hatred, discrimination, violence, and social exclusion, directly confronts the caste setups and its inflictions on the Dalits.

Dalit literature which encompasses various literary genres like songs, poetry, short stories, essays, novels, memoirs and autobiographies have created rich literary mosaic in Indian context. Though the traces of Dalit literature can be found before and during colonial rule, the modern movement gained significant momentum after India's freedom from Britons only. Despite most of the Dalit literature is regional and linguistically limited to respective areas, however their translations into English have drawn international recognition and response because of their advocacy for the human rights and narrating the endurances. Dalit

literature as it is often seen as both counter and protest literature, encompasses a wide range of voices and perspectives from within the Dalit community, and shares each with unique experiences and themes of resistance, aiming on raising the voice of voiceless people against existing social hierarchies.

The early Dalit literature in reference to Indian history traces back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Madara Chennaiah who belongs to the time of Western Chalukyas was a well-known Vachana (free verse) poet, advocates for the rights of downtrodden sects. Bhakti saints like Sant Chokamela and Namdev, expounded the rights of untouchables by singing songs of devotion in 14<sup>th</sup> century. Ravidasa, a renowned spiritual leader who belongs to 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century had contributed well in establishment of identity for the downtrodden sects through his songs. In Telugu region, Pothuluri Veerbrahmam and Yogi Vemana raised their voices against the social distinction, shown in the name caste, and supported the untouchables for the establishment of their dignity. Similarly, in the early modern time Jyotirao Phule, Narayan guru, B.R. Ambedkar, Iyothee Thass, Sahodaran Ayyappan, Ayyankali, Poykayil Appachan and Sahu Maharaj have contributed very much not only in literary aspect but also in social aspect. In addition to the above social reformers, many great scholars have emerged as the counter writers to the mainstream litterateurs in the recent times who often present the issues of Dalits as the crux subject matters. Some of them are as: Sharan Kumar Limbale, Baburao Bagul, Namdev Dasal, Sekhar Bandopadhyay, Jayadeep Sarangee, Manohar Mouli Biswas, Arjun Dangle, Mahaswetha Devi, Yendluri Sudhakar, Sivakami, Bama, Rabi Sing, Dev Kumar Annabhau Sathe and many others had left an indelible imprint in giving life to the genre of Dalit literature and making it part of the mainstream literature in the modern time.

The Dalit literature is represented by revolt and negativism, since it is intimately associated with the hopes of freedom of a group of underprivileged people of various castes, communities and religions. Among them, the majority of the communities tried their best to ameliorate their miseries. Various governments fail to proscribe the atrocities against the Dalits in the eight decades of independent India. As a result, no remarkable change has been seen in the Dalits' lives in the Nineteenth and Twentieth century period. A large number of cultures and traditions have been traced in India, among which only the Christian and Buddhist cultures care for untouchables, while the Hindu culture focuses on god, temple, and religious texts. No place of identity has been given to Dalits in the Hindu religion. As a result conversion into other religions and migration to other areas have become common practices for gaining the identity for themselves.

Dalit autobiographical literature plays very important role in recreation of the past glory by establishing it as a latest genre. In subaltern literature, indeed it stands next to the Dalit poetry. The Maratha region has a historical importance in giving life to the Dalit literature, and making it a leading branch after 1960. In between 1960 and 1970 this literature began to emerge as a powerful branch to counter the established hegemonic literature, advocating the social, political and economic justice for the outcaste people along the lines of the spirit of constitution of India. The autobiographies like Baburao Bagul's *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti* 1963, Annabhahu Sathe's *Fakira* 1963, Baby Kamble's *Jina Amucha* , Urmila Pawar's *the weave of my life*, Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* 1997, Bamas Kurukku 1992, Sidda Lingaiah's *Ooru keru* 1995 are some of the main exemplifications in this regard which set the Dalit autobiographical literature as an important literary genre in the recent time.

The Dalit autobiographers however used appropriate language when compared to the previous writers. The language adopted by them is local, which is considered as rustic by the critics. Therefore, the Dalit writers are deeply engrossed in the portrayal of the realism. Their feelings can be articulated in their own language. No other language would serve the purpose accurately. The Dalit language therefore would convey the feelings appropriately

The present article deals with the critical analysis of *Changiya Rukh*, one of the first generation Dalit autobiographies to appear in English. This book, having twenty sub-chapters, deals with different aspects of Punjabi region. From the first sub-chapter 'My Birthplace Madhopur' to the twentieth sub-chapter 'Being a Tenant', of the work make their own presentation with reference to multiple aspects of Dalits in India. It has a great importance in relation to Punjabi Dalit literary movement, and in its emergence. It indeed becomes an inspiration to many other Dalit authors across the state as well as nation. Like the other Dalit autobiographies, it juxtaposes the bitter experiences of the Dalit community. Above all this is an exclusive autobiography on a categorical caste of Chamar called Ad Dharmi. Later it was translated into English for a sympathetic globalization of agony of Ad Dharmi, an untouchable sub-caste that comes under Chamar caste. This is known as the first Punjabi Dalit translated autobiography in English. Dr. Harish K. Puri opines, "Madhopuri's autobiography is the story of the Dalits' angst of deprivation, social exclusion and humiliation, as well as of resistance, achievement and hope. The subjective narrative of a Dalit author tends to universalize the caste-based experience of his caste" (Puri 13). The author is encouraged to pen down this autobiography by the 'Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra' organization, which actually struggles for the upliftment of Dalits after drawing the inspiration from the 'Black Panthers of America' that struggles for the basic rights of Negroes in America. Further, it also

explores the emergence of Dalit literature and its existence in the contemporary literary arena of the country. It also deals with the detailed descriptions of political, social and literary movements with regard to the life of Dalits of both pre-independent and post-independent India.

The title *Changiya Rukh* has been used metaphorically for the work which means to ‘cut short’ or ‘make dwarf’. This metaphorical usage of the title indeed conveys another hidden meaning that aptly serves the purpose of the author as well as other Dalit intellectuals who always wish to condemn the atrocities of upper castes’ people on the Dalits and advocates for the life of the Dalits. The way the tree is lopped and dwarfed from its gigantic shape, the Dalits of the region are also robbed and exploited to not get any development in their life. The symbolic usage of the title tells us the Dalits were made shrunk due to the exploitation of the upper castes. The author clearly narrates his experiences on the basis of social differences in his work. The narration which has been presented in twenty chapters with different aspects has the detailed delineation of the time, from his birth to the time of writing the autobiography. Though the mental pain of every Dalit in India is same, but the treatment meted out to the author makes some difference in this memoir. In fact the author uses the title of the work figuratively, and the autobiography as a weapon of articulation and resistance for his identity. Dilip Menon in an interview with James C. Scott comments about Dalit personal narratives, “weapons of the weak, and subterranean forms of resistance” (Menon 9).

The author presents the memoir, explaining how the majority Dalits undergo the ordeal situations in the process of making their survival with a special reference to the religions, politics and terrorism during the partition of the country. He also writes about how the glorious caste has been dwarfed and exploited in different ways

by the Jhats, an upper caste of Punjab region. His dream of being an independent in the life becomes an important subject matter of the work. In this way, the author shares his views regarding the creation of caste and religion. His desire to perceive unconditional education makes a great deference in his life. His father plays a pivotal role in providing him the studies. It is also observed, how the author's family faced the odd experiences, the structural inequalities and the injustice by the caste society. Thus his journey with natural abilities against the phony social impediments have left a page for him in the history of Dalit literature.

*Changiya Rukh*, being a Punjabi narrative, talks about Punjab region's socio-cultural identity in a historical perspective. Punjab is a state with the highest Dalit population in the country. According to 2001 census this state has 28.9 per cent Dalits in its total population when the 16.5 was the average Dalit per cent in the country. Though the state has the highest percent of Dalits, but does not make any difference in being exploited in the hands of upper caste people. Even their highest populous percent could not resist the commonality of organized exploitation in the name of caste. The way the Dalits in the other states were treated, the same way they were treated here too. This says, the treatment of hatred, exploitation, and discrimination have not yet stopped. In fact they were the constant victims of rigorous ill treatments of the Jhat people.

The Jhats who are agrarians by profession, always feel themselves as an upper class people due to their economic progress, land ownership and domination over the low caste people, particularly in the area of Jalandar. They are ferocious in nature therefore they would often behave very harsh towards Dalits. Their privileged right to the land was forcefully claimed and the same is denied to the Dalits in order to continue their legacy on the Dalits. As a result they never allowed the Dalits to own

the lands, and were left to live at their mercy by allowing them to do laborious works only in their fields. Harish K Puri writes, “Historically, the outcastes such as Valmiki, Mazhabi (Chuhra Sikhs), Chamar, Ramdasi, Chamar Sikhs and among others, were not allowed ownership of land. Under British rule, the Land Alienation Act of 1901 had debarred them from buying land” (Puri 21). The oppression of the Dalits in Punjab has been predominantly seen due to the agricultural economy of this agrarian caste, Jhats who later showed their interest in politics. Anthropologist Indera Pal Singh mentions “Most of the Sikh values are Jhat values, and the Jhats assert that they occupy the highest position among the Sikh castes” (Pal Singh 70). In fact the Jhats were not the upper caste people but their interest in agriculture which was promoted by the available rivers and dams made them evolve to the status of high caste like Brahmins. As Ajmer Singh opines in this context:

Socio-cultural life in Punjab underwent a marked change after India’s Independence. After the rehabilitation of refugees, and consolidation of holdings, a far-reaching impact was made by the Green Revolution. One manifest consequence of the new form of capitalist agriculture that privileged the big land owning entrepreneur was the rise of the *Jhattvaad*, signifying a Jhat swagger based on power, and arrogance. For the rural the Dalits, this became the keyword for their oppression, and humiliation. (Singh 295)

Punjab, being a frontier region of the country, faces many hordes of invaders over thousands of years. Harish K Puri writes, many invaders such as, “the Greeks, the Shakas, the Parthians, the Kushans, and still later, the Turks, the Persians, and others from central Asia, such as the Indo-Scythians, have invaded it” (Puri 17). Most of them were got absorbed into frontier population. Consequently, that leads to a cultural diversity. Therefore, we can see that the Dalits of India are not sharing

a monolithic identity due to the cultural diversity. They can help us in making a sense of multiplicity of interests about the Dalits and their struggle for identity and justice across the country. Further, he opines, “owing to a variety of historical, and cultural reasons, the ideological basis of untouchability was markedly weaker in this region than in other parts of India” (Puri17). Except the severe untouchability, all the other ill practices were strictly applied to them so as to degrade these untouchables.

Historian, Buddha Prakash writes the phenomenon, “The Socio-Cultural Panmixia of Punjab”. According to him, Brahminical orthodoxy had “practically abandoned” the Punjab region, and shifted to the Indo-Gangetic region, quite early in history” (Prakash 8). To strengthen the argument of caste system in this area, another supportive argument by K. S. Singh, an archaeologist of ASI has been said in this regard. He writes, “Punjab probably represents the finest example of syncretism that emerged in the medieval period” (Singh 15). However, they were not allowed to live in the main village by being denied of constructing the bricks structures. If the people of low caste goes against the wish of the upper castes, would receive the result of either being expelled from the village or being punished severely. Extending free services under the caste obligation by the low caste people for the upper castes are also made mandatory at any cost. Disobeying, and deviating from them would lead to serious consequences. Nobody had the right to expostulate the free service until the independence had liberated the Dalits from such evil shackles. Denzil Ibbetson, an Indian Civil Servant (ICS), who conducts the first serious survey on the castes of Punjab in 1881, discovered that “the region was “a notable exception” to the caste system in India. He found it to be “more Mohammedan than Hindu,” and commented that Islam in Punjab was “as a rule free from fanaticism” (Ibbetson 17).

As earlier stated, the book has been narrated in the form of chapterisation to make it different from other biographies for delineating very deeply about author's life. The present autobiography *Changiya Rukh* is not merely a record of subjectivity of a Dalit person but also works as a social record of objectivities with a special reference to the past and present of the society. The autobiography exclusively gives an account of changing conditions in socio-cultural setups. When the author was in school standard, he would be often told by the elders of the caste that there is a difference between upper caste students and lower caste students as the difference is seen between the Earth and Sky in respect of education.

The progressive and radical thoughts of communists influence the Sikhism, and provided a mark of change in the Dalits of the region. At one point of time the Ad Dharmi people rose to the level of demanding a special religious status for their self-respectful life. Madhopuri's recollections from the past, and contemporary life regarding the casteism show his sensitive reactions towards its impacts. He captures the smells, tastes, sounds and colors of the Vehra of his childhood which enable the literary world to empathize with the misery of poverty, sorrows, foods like meat of dead cattle, lice-infested clothes, filth-laden streets, caste abuses, body language, accent, insults, outrage and clashes among others. Further the author advocates for his caste people's dream of having a piece of land for their peaceful life. When there had been a discussion about the agricultural land, and life of the Dalits from UP, some things came to be known which were indeed worse than that of Punjabi Dalits. They share their miserable conditions that how their women were victims of 'Thakur' caste people in the areas UP. Thus the people of UP share it as: "You people talk of a piece of land... it seems to me that our poor people's wives, and daughters are their common property... You are better off than us... What if you do not have! You at least have the honor" makes the elders of the author's caste speechless (Puri

25). Such experiences which arose due to the ill-practices exemplify the deplorable conditions not only of Punjab and UP but also the whole contemporary India.

The compilation of autobiography into twenty different chapters is the best exemplification of autobiographical narration and for its honest presentation of author's life and social conditions. This remains one of the ever best motivational work for presenting the author's life from penniless childhood to the great heights in life with dignity. In the first chapter of the autobiography, the author gives the account of village settlement in a historical perspective. He says: "The settlements of the untouchables are always in the lower ends-the Western part-of a village, in Punjab as it is all over India" (Madhopuri 9). His second chapter of the autobiography talks about the prevailing social conditions of that then time. Their social ill-treatment which was indeed indescribable shapes the work. Their miserable conditions about sweet food that usually distributed at their holy shrine show the wretched condition of the caste people. The author openly shares how do the caste Sikhs treat the low caste children at the Gurudwara on festival days, and advocates as the caste system is interminable even after the their conversions into other religions. Denial of author's tender dream of planting a mango sapling at his house shows the author's inefficacy in this regard. Therefore he feels that he should not be submissive to anybody at any stage by drawing the inspiration from different people and situations at different stages of his life. When he observes the local Jhats, and their self-respectful life, he also dreams of this lifestyle for himself in the future. However, the Jhats never tolerate anybody if they get change by imitating them in anyway, and very importantly it is applied to these Dalits. They have a misconception regarding the Dalits that they may also become domineering people like Jhats. Therefore both Judge Paramjit Singh and Harish K. Puri writes as: "the Jhats routinely lamented that "The Mazhabis wanted to behave like the Jhats," or

that “once they will start beating the Jhats” (Judge 82 & Puri 329). Later, the writer dreams of having his own farm, and accordingly he also wants to lead a self-respectful life for himself. When he sees his uncle Phumman resisting a Jhat farmer for scolding the Dalits unnecessarily at one time, the author, being a child feels himself of being as brave as Phumman. Upon seeing the communist leaders, their eloquence and command over the social issues, he further dreams of being as knowledgeable as them. As a result of observation and interest, he builds up his carrier with high aspirations and self-respect.

The narrative further delineates the author’s childhood attachment with cows. Thus he writes, he and his friends would enjoy a lot seeing the herd of the cows for the reason of having milk form them. For some times, he would steel some drops of milk along with his friends by feeding it with the grass. Above all he writes about the importance of cow in the lives of Dalits. On one night, there had been a long talk about cow and its importance in the house. Bhaia, the father of author enlightens the children by revealing the importance of cow and its flesh. But, the revealment of cow has been objected by his wife. However, he speaks about the treacherous attitude of Brahmin regarding the cow. He tells it to his wife, saying, “You do not know how devious they are! At the Bhogapur-Adampur meeting, Lahori Ram Bali told us that in ancient times Brahmins ate beef. It is written in the Hindu scriptures, that one can earn virtue by serving Brahmins with beef on the occasion of Shradda” (Madhopuri 45). When he discloses as to his wife, she objects in order to avoid the talk, and says her husband, “You”re mad, and now do not misguide these boys!” (Madhopuri 45). However, the author, being a boy forgets all that, and goes out to enjoy himself seeing arrival of the herd along with other kids.

In the next chapters, the author attempts to discover the importance of both religion and its god with a special reference to the atheism in his narrative. The

author was very attentive towards his father's version of both the religion, and god. Bhaia, the father of the author tries to enlighten his children about Hinduism, and its deceitfulness by giving strong counter to the Brahmins, and allege that they were the main reason for their destitute conditions of lives. Further he writes, "By us giving alms to the Brahmins? This beggar caste has never worked with their own hands; they enjoy life at the cost of those people, who are not permitted to go near them!" (Madhopuri 45). When the author listens to his father's version that was obvious about Brahmins' attitude, and cow, he felt happy about knowing that the cow is not mother to them, but they were nurtured by these cows. So he writes about the Brahmins that "they have divided society into castes. It is these crafty people, who are blasphemous for them" (Madhopuri 46). Consequently, Bhaia educates his children about the Hindu society which is supported and survived by the caste system, and the gods.

The Bhaia, never agrees with these high caste people's policies, and their ideology. Moreover, he points out the so called Hindus for treating some portion of followers as untouchables and allowing them to be outcastes. So he writes, "Tell me, where do we stand in the scheme of Brahmins, Kshatrias, Vaishyas, and Shudras? We have neither a religion nor a caste" (Madhopuri 61). He never tolerates anyone, if anybody discriminate them in the name the caste. So he thinks, the Buddhism as an alternative religion due to the impact of Dr. Ambedkar who eventually suggests the mass conversion of Dalits into Buddhism to get rid of these humiliations. He thinks it is as an ultimate remedy to get rid of the caste stricture, and to get the equality in many ways than being either in Hinduism or Sikhism where the caste is not yet absent. The scholars both Marengo & Puri opine as: "The out castes of Hinduism did not cease to be outcastes after joinig the Sikh Panth... In fact; the Sikh caste evolved in a new caste hierarchy parallel to that of the Hindu caste" (Marengo

208). That is the reason why he prefers Buddhism than being in other religions, because “the Buddhists do not believe in Thinkers or caste, and all are treated equal” (Madhopuri 62).

The autobiography presents a serious debate about the caste system by his father. The author as a kid surprises listening to the debate about the caste and religion through which he could learn some facts. The people of Purbia from Uttar Pradesh have to undergo deplorable conditions due to Thakurs of that area. A Purbian, who comes from Uttar Pradesh to Punjab, discloses their deplorable conditions and pathetic situations of the eastern UP stating that their Purbia women were used as they wish. He thus writes, comparing the conditions of the Dalits in Punjab with the Dalits of UP in which he can find the conditions of Dalits in Punjab are being better than that of UP. He further shares about the prostitutes in Mumbai that how the white skinned woman of high caste has very much demand than low caste black skinned woman. Thus he was very empathetic towards every social problem, and presents condemning them in his work. He writes, “My mind was in a turmoil after I overheard the conversation between my father, and bhaias. There were many things I had not fully grasped, and though I struggled to do so, I failed to understand them” (Madhopuri 74).

The discussion of youngsters with Garib Das, a blind sadhu shows the changing attitude of the outcaste people. Garib Das, who says as the universe was created by the God Brahma, and the four thinkers were born out of his four organs becomes the burning matter of the discussion at that moment. The young progressive children never allowed the blind sadhu win the debate, and made him pack up with their logical questions. This debate gives immense happiness to Bhaia. So he remarks, “Having heard those boys’ arguments, I feel that we are blind, accept

whatever anyone tells” (Madhopuri 96). After all, the author expresses his satisfaction about the argument, and says contentedly as:

The meeting, and what Bhaia had said gave me a new direction. I felt rejuvenated. I could see the lantern, which had illuminated the meeting place. It seemed as if I had broken free a trap laid by these tales of Brahma the way the man in space had vanquished the earth’s gravity” (Madhopuri 96).

The author, being a learner, goes under the influences of many new things. He receives the change through both learning and sensual experiences at different times. The author, who heard about Lal Bahadur Shastri, the Prime Minister of India, inspires him a lot for his hardworking, systematic, and sincere life style. His success from penury to the position of Prime Minister attracts the child very much, and influences him a lot. Once, while he was coming from the school, he compares his life with Shastri, who was indeed a poor man in his childhood. The author comes to know that by sheer hard work as Shastri had become the prime minister of country, he could be achieving something if he works hard like Shastri. Thus he opines, “how did it matter if I did not have an extra set of clothes? I had my Bhaia, and Ma. Shastri lost his father! If he could rise to become prime minister of the country by sheer hard work, and determination, I too would be able to achieve many things if I studied hard” (Madhopuri 99). He also writes about his people’s experiences regarding the partition of the country. And, says Punjab, being a frontier state of the country remains a witness of the atrocities on people during partition of the country. He shares his grief after hearing it from his people that “such a day should never be fallen an enemy” (Madhopuri 99). Till today they reminisce the partition of country, saying that if Pakistan had not been created, the frontier people would not have faced

such atrocities. So the people of the area consoled themselves to feel it was as their fate that has to be faced.

The author never hesitates to refer to his humiliated experiences in this work. Some of his experiences were written uncertainly. He shares one of his experiences that shows his strong desire for the change of his life style. Whenever if he were asked to get the impure juice by both Ma and Bhaia, he would feel bit ashamed to bring it. He knows that his collection of impure juice is undoubtedly causing him the disrespect by his friends. However the parents could not understand the tender mind feelings, and often assign the task for which he was humiliated. Whenever he was seen carrying the scum, he would feel very ashamed of himself, and, was called sarcastically as: “you are dark, and dirty because you drink this dirty juice!” (Madhopuri 102). As a result he would feel like throwing away the bucket of juice, but he could not do due to the bellies’ sticking to hunger. After knowing the life of Lal Bahadur Shastri, he got restored with the self confidence and tries to accept the challenges about to come in his life. The author gives another account of self-respect lessness despite of caste and status. One of such incidents that a Jhat family begging at the cost of their pride, status and other things was seen for their survival. This has been said as: “trouble or hunger do not ask your castes. We lead this life of indignity because of deprivation, and poverty” (Madhopuri 102). Therefore he decides to have at least minimum change in his life, and for his future generations too. All the experiences undergone by him and his caste people made him get a new life, full of change, self-respect and dignity for both himself and his caste. Thus the narration remains a best Dalit memoir, giving numerous accounts not only about his ‘self’ but also his caste with a special reference to a varied socio, political, cultural and other aspects of Dalit as well as upper castes in the country for which the change is inevitable in order to prove its ‘unity in diversity’.

The caste discrimination was the constant problem for the author throughout different stages of his life. The Jhat children who were from the domineering caste would often treat these low caste children with contempt and discrimination. And, even at the public water taps, it doesn't make any difference. The author, as a child could not understand the reason for what, and why the ill-treatment has been meted out to them. Sometimes, he would feel whether it was due to his touching the dead animal or their poverty! However he would be often confused about the ill-treatment for tormenting them. Thus he writes as "this made me wonder what was wrong with my hands that others had to wash a tap after I had touched it" (Madhopuri 25). Another incident, which would often bother him was about the locust eating, a common habit of the caste to eat the locusts during their season. As a result, the author has been called a locust eater by his friends. So, he writes, "I would argue with myself, 'mutton is cooked in households on the occasion of Diwali and Dussehra, and yet no one comments on it!'" (Madhopuri 29).

Thus the author tries to understand the reasons behind treating them as untouchables, and imitates the Jhats life style to get rid of caste stigma for a self-respectful life. Yet, even after attaining success in his life, he faces the atrocities in other forms. But he never compromised in facing the problems time to time, and rebuilding his personality accordingly. He promptly presents the caste stigmata, saying that wherever he is; the inquiry about the caste had not been stopped by the neighbors. Thus he faced the caste problem at all the stages of his life. Therefore, he finally recognizes, and suggests the Dalits in the last chapter of the book, titled "Humanist Slap", in which the slap is suggested as an ultimate remedy to overcome

the problem of caste, and to restore the 'identity for oneself' and 'the ideal society for nation' whenever if anybody is asked for what caste does he belong?

Thus the autobiography extensively chronicles the oppressive and exploitative stratum of the caste system in rural Punjab, which kept the Dalits in a state of economic, political and social dependence on feudal castes. As time passed, some of the educated Dalits like author, started thinking of themselves and their restoration in as many ways as possible. Thus the central theme of the narrative details the journey of the author to overcome the dependence through his determination, hard work, and pursuit of education, social mobility to be a voice against the very system that victimize him as well as his caste. And, it also explores the process of reclaiming a sense of identity, which had systematically denied by the caste system. Therefore, the portrayed success of the author from dependence to independence, undoubtedly remains a form of resistance and a way to assert self-respect, challenging the social order, and motivating the future generations of Dalit communities in the country.

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